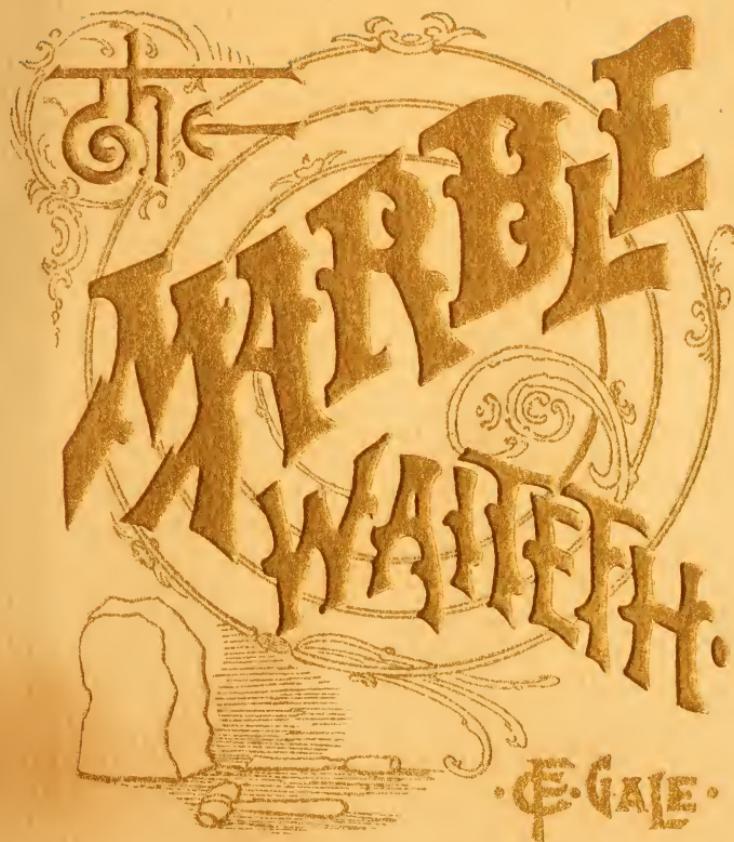


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THE MARBLE WAITETH.



A Poem,

BY CHARLES F. GALE.



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THE MARBLE WAITETH.



The marble waiteth, my preceptor taught ;
The marble waiteth —thus in youth I thought ;—
Thou art the sculptor ; ready at thy hand
The chisel lieth, waiting thy command.
This hand shall carve in marble ; those who may
Shall mold their fragile images of clay ;
This hand shall carve a laurel wreath of fame
And in its circle write a deathless name
High on the shaft, to teach a future age
What master passions in this bosom rage.
Poor dreamer ! Little dost thou understand
The hidden power that directs thy hand,
Or know how devious are the paths that stray
From childhood's morn to manhood's riper day,
Or how the *ignes fatui* round thee lurk
To lure thee farther from thy chosen work.
Think how we boys made images of snow
In winters really not so long ago,
And how they melted 'neath the noonday sun,
E'en as our bright ideals, one by one,
Have spread their gauzy wings and taken flight
As mists that form and vanish with the night.

In youth, the bow of promise in the sky
Ensnakes the heart and captivates the eye,
Till some well-favored imp, with heart of guile,
Whispers, with knowing look and winning smile,
"A pot of gold is hidden at its base."
And then begins the headlong steeplechase
O'er stream and meadow, mountain and morass ;
We crush the flowers unheeded as we pass
That yield their fragrance to th' offending heel
Nor touch the conscience with their mute appeal ;
On, and still on, we urge our mission blind,
Youth rushes by, and Age stalks on behind,
The bow is swallowed up in leaden skies—
We cheat the senses, nor obtain the prize.
Oft Love entices us with glowing charms
To rest from labor in her sensuous arms,
And, like the Lotus Eaters, drop the oar
And furl the sail, nor wander evermore,
And drift forever on enchanted streams,
And sate the senses with elysian dreams.
We pause a moment where the ways divide,
Then drift enraptured on its placid tide,
Or cast one backward look and breathe a sigh,
And in the cradle hush Ambition's cry,
And for the babe build palaces as fair
As those that crumbled in youth's radiant air.
'Tis given to few to see the golden yield
Of grain that waves in youth's hope-nurtured field ;
Few finish 'neath life's ever westering sun
The task in youth so hopefully begun :

For, though the sunset tint the autumn skies
With hues that rival e'en Aurora's dyes,
The blood will cool before the evening gale,
The feet will falter and the strength will fail.
Age faints and staggers up the weary road,
But younger shoulders blithely take the load.
We turn the wheel that spins the silken strands—
The fabric is the toil of other hands.
Sustained by hope and love, from day to day
We model our ideals in the clay ;
Our children, haply, take the marble fine
And carve in lasting stone each fair design.
The Hand that doles out moments to the man
Holds centuries and cycles in its span ;
The god of destiny no pity feels
But drags the ages at his chariot wheels.
Each century, howe'er by triumphs crowned,
Shall go to fill the cycles' measure round,
And, with its fading vision, shall behold
The purple east transformed to pearl and gold,
Where stands a morn more fair than brush hath drawn,
Holding aside the curtains of the dawn,
Showing a future 'mid the melting gloom
Radiant as bride who waits th' expectant groom,
The torch of progress in her lifted hand
And, on her brow, the signet of command.
The marble waiteth—it shall ever be
The present's triumphs are but prophecy ;
Whate'er achievements this proud age may boast
Are but as humble stepping stones at most,

To grander thoughts and more enduring deeds ;
For Christian love shall take the place of creeds,
Each future's future see the sun arise
With light that dazzles its astonished eyes ;
Each century see greater wonders done
Than any past had hoped to see begun ;
Its statesmen rule with more bénignant sway,
Triumphant Labor hail the better day,
Its poets give themselves to fairer dreams,
Its bluer skies reflect in clearer streams ;
And wars shall cease and men shall brothers be,
Nor blood be more the price of liberty.

The marble waiteth :—Long since have I learned
The full fruition of our dreams is earned
And paid to us as wages day by day ;
We need not wait 'till hairs are turning gray
And footsteps totter, and the feeble hand
Scarce holds the coins our heavy toils command,
And till the failing eye with tears complains
It cannot see to count our glittering gains.
The toiler's pleasure is both end and means ;
Day after day his tireless sickle gleans
The ears that go to make the golden sheaf.
The book of life is written leaf by leaf ;
Too oft 'tis closed as written, till in age
The trembling hand turns back each time-dimmed page
To find that in the record of the years
The sunshine has remained, but not the tears.
Then let those poor whose only joy is wealth
Sell love and barter happiness and health

For that which perisheth ; but let us stay
And pluck the flowers that blossom by the way.
The rose that blooms beside the garden wall
Will yield its fragrance ere its petals fall ;
The poppy pays its tribute to the eye
Though in the hand its beauties quickly die.
The marble waiteth :—Then let each with care
And patient toil a model fit prepare.
What though no Phidian touch the clay shall mold
Nor hand of Angelo the chisel hold,
Let honest purpose over fate prevail
And hope embellish where the hand shall fail.
Let each one carve according to his gift,
And, when the Master's hand the veil shall lift,
And each to all his masterpiece display,
And at its base the battered chisel lay,
It may not be that he who fairest wrought
Nor he whose purse hath costliest marble bought,
But he, who, patiently from day to day,
Strove to perfect his model in the clay,
Whose brow at last shall wear the victor's crown
And at the Master's hand obtain renown.
What though the sculptor work with silent hand,
Nor Parian block take life at his command,
If baser stuff he mold instead of fine
And clothe its poverty with thoughts divine,
His be the honor, though the cunning hand
That wrought the model, and the brain that planned,
Have dust to dust and earth to earth returned,
If so the fire that in his bosom burned

Shall light the flame in some congenial breast
To fix in stone his thoughts in clay expressed.
So in the clay my finished work shall be ;
The marble waiteth, but 'tis not for me.
I gladly take my self-appointed task,
And only one—this simple boon—I ask :
When I have reached the promised age of man,
And life has dwindled to the shortest span,
And Time, the master, makes his evening round
Among his pupils, may I still be found—
With stooping form and temples sunk and gray,
My palsied hand still modeling in clay—
Still looking forward with prophetic eye,
Still having faith that, in the bye-and-bye,
Where all life's mysteries shall be explained,
Where life's perfection is at last attained,
The marble waiteth.

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